



April 27, 2006

House Conservation, Forestry and Outdoor Recreation Committee  
Lansing, Michigan

Re: SB 971 and 972 – Protecting Michigan's State Parks from Sale

Dear Committee members,

The Michigan Environmental Council strongly supports policies to protect Michigan's State Parks. Our state parks hold some of our state's and the nation's most remarkable lands. They contain our remaining old-growth forests, miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, and the largest stretch of freshwater dunes anywhere in the world. Our state parks and recreation areas provide a public space for recreation within an hour's drive of every resident in Michigan, and play an important role in Michigan's tourism industry by drawing 22 million visitors each year.

Despite the value of our parks to the state, they continue to face threats including proposals to sell off park lands as a way of raising funds for our state. Most recently, this fall, the Mackinac Center's Russ Harding proposed that the state sell 14 of our 97 parks.

Unfortunately, current law does not adequately protect our state parks from these threats. We applaud Senator Brown and Senator Birkholz for taking the initiative to address this problem by introducing SB 971 and 972, intended to provide further protections against the sale of our state parks.

The bills have been weakened from their original form to provide the Department of Natural Resources with flexibility to manage the parks. While we understand the departments need for flexibility, we believe stronger laws are needed to adequately protect the parks and that this can be done without hindering the department's ability to effectively manage our state parks.

We would like to see the bills improved to:

- Broaden oversight of the proposed sale of state park land, especially for parcels smaller than 100 acres or 15% of the total acreage. This could be done by requiring approval by the Citizen's Committee (as the bill originally would have done), approval by the Natural Resources Commission (they currently give their non-binding recommendation), or by requiring Legislative approval for these smaller parcels as well.
- Clarify that any sale of state park land must be for the purpose of acquiring state park land of equal or greater value and to further the DNR's mission of "conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the State's natural resources for current and future generations."

Sincerely,

Kate Madigan, Deputy Policy Director

